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COLUMBUS SCHOOL FOR GIRLS PLAYS

What Makes Christmas Christmas

GRACE LATIMER JONES

WHAT MAKES CHRISTMAS CHRISTMAS: A MORALITY PLAY IN ONE ACT WRITTEN BY GRACE LATIMER JONES

COLUMBUS, OHIO
SPAHR AND GLENN
MDCDXVII

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By Grace Latimer Jones

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JAN 10 1918

No. 2

NOTE

"What Makes Christmas Christmas" was written for the Columbus School for Girls and was performed for the first time at the Christmas Dinner, 1916. It is fully protected by copyright. Application for the privilege of performing the play must be made to the author, care Columbus School for Girls, Columbus, Ohio.

The author hereby makes grateful acknowledgment of many suggestions which, while the play was writing, came to her from divers sources.

COLUMBUS SCHOOL FOR GIRLS PLAYS

WHAT MAKES CHRISTMAS CHRISTMAS

THE CHARACTERS

CHRISTMAS GIFTS
MONEY
CHRISTMAS TREE
CHRISTMAS STOCKING
PLUM PUDDING
AN OLD MAN
A CHILD
THE KING'S SON
A SPIRIT

WHAT MAKES CHRISTMAS CHRISTMAS

A Morality Play

THE SCENE—*At the sides and back the stage is hung with curtains of a cold grey tone, lighter toward the top. In the upper left corner a bright star is shining. Across the top at the front hangs a dark grey curtain, stencilled in a geometric design with dull gold paint. A dark line of drapery borders the sides of the proscenium. A little to the right, centre, and more than half way back, is a stone bench, with a pine tree at each end. The light is diffused and dim, to represent night. In the distance an almost imperceptible regular drumming is heard. During the solemn parts of the play this monotonous beat is always audible, determining the tempo of the movement.*

There enters right Christmas Gifts, a coquettish, elf-like figure in a gold tunic and a stiff skirt, stopping at the knees. On her head is a gold cap like a cornucopia, and her stockings and slippers are gold. She enters dancing. She is followed by Money Bag, who loiters sulkily behind, examining a little musical pipe which he carries. Money Bag is dressed in a loose brown bag, tied up about the neck with a hempen rope. Otherwise he looks a little like a Brownie.

MONEY

Why *are* you so excited, Gifts?

GIFTS

Why, because it's Christmas eve, Mr. Money Bag. (*She courtsies mockingly.*)

MONEY

Christmas is no better for gifts than any other time of year. What's the matter with birthdays?

GIFTS (*kissing him, and dancing off*)

Poor old Money Bag, it's a great drain on you!

MONEY

Yes it is! See how poor and thin I've grown! A month ago my sides were all bulgy with my savings.

GIFTS (*saucily*)

But it's a season when I thrive!

MONEY

You thrive, my lady, at my expense!

GIFTS (*caressingly*)

I want to dance, Money dear. Play me a nice little tune!

MONEY (*pouting*)

Whenever you want anything, then you're very nice to me, with your "Money dears!" You always have to rely on me for whatever you want.

GIFTS

Money makes the—*dance* go, yes! You're not a very aesthetic creature, though. (*Money tosses his head angrily.*) Oh, but we all love you. You're ever so much better than you look. Come, play me a nice little tune to dance to—tra-la-la-la! Tra-la-la-la!

MONEY

(*still pouting and shaking his head*)

I think my pipe is broken. (*He plays a few discords.*)

GIFTS

You're always "broke" when I ask you for anything! Come—just one little tune!

Money begins to play, and Gifts starts her dance. Suddenly, abruptly in the middle of a strain, Money breaks off, and begins to examine his pipe with great interest.

GIFTS (*stamping her foot*)

O do play! It's so tantalising, Money, to have you give out this way!

MONEY (*complainingly*)

Yes, it's Money this, and Money that—at your beck and call all the while! I can't keep on forever, can I, with no pauses to catch my breath? It's hard work to keep time all the time!!

GIFTS (*kissing him*)

There's a good old Money Bag, a nice old Money Bag! Of course you have to pretend that times are hard.

Money grunts and begins to play. After a few bars, he again stops abruptly on a high note, and falls to examining his pipe.

GIFTS

You always give out this way at the crucial moment! Dear Money, just one more little strain!

MONEY

The strain's too much for me!

GIFTS

How stingy you are! And your music is pretty poor, too!

MONEY (*angrily*)

I notice it's good enough for your dancing!

GIFTS

I'd dance to a different tune if I could! (*airily*) It's my artistic temperament, anyway, which furnishes all the charm.

MONEY

Artistic temperament, indeed! When did that ever furnish anything but trouble, I'd like to know?

Enter left Christmas Tree. He wears a short, flaring green tunic, trimmed with horizontal evergreen bands, green knickers, brown stockings, and scarlet slippers. On his head is a peaked green cap. From time to time electric lights shine out on the point of his cap, and in the evergreen bands.

TREE

Here, here, you two squabbling again? Why it's Christmas eve, the time for shouting and laughter! See how I shine!! (*The bulbs glow and flicker out.*)

GIFTS

He won't play for me!

TREE

O yes he will, and like a right good fellow, too! Why one hour more and it will be Christmas, Mr. Bag. See how I shine with the festive spirit! (*The lights glow a moment.*) Now, if ever, is the time to play! Come, Gifts, we'll have a little dance together!

They caper about, but Money continues to sulk and examine his pipe.

TREE

Come, come, Money, what would Gifts be without you?

MONEY

She can expect no more of me!

GIFTS

(*flinging arms round his neck*)

Dear old Money Bag!

MONEY

You're too fickle!

GIFTS

Not in loving you!

TREE (*coaxingly*)

This is the season of jollity! See how I shine! (*The lights glow again.*)

MONEY (*grudgingly*)

Just one short piece, then!

He begins to play. Gifts and Tree join hands.

TREE

It's scandalous the way you treat him. You're so changeable.

GIFTS

You seem to forget that Christmas Gifts must be all things to all men!

They dance. Presently the music stops again on a high note in the middle of a strain.

GIFTS (*angrily*)

Money has given out again!

A new tune starts up merrily, as Stocking enters left. He wears a blue and white doublet, and a square cap on his head. On the whole he resembles a checked Pantaloon more than anything else. Stocking dances gaily, while Gifts and Tree give him the floor.

GIFTS

Poor Stocking! It's very seldom Money spends any effort on him!

TREE

You mean it's very seldom Money is ever spent on him. Women are so reckless in what they say!

Stocking stops, breathless.

GIFTS

How well you dance tonight, Stocking!

STOCKING

On Christmas eve I always dance well—I'm dancing dreams into the heads of all the children! "The stockings are hung by the chimney with care," you know! That's the very core of the whole thing! What would Christmas be without me? Why, I *am* Christmas!!

TREE

Rubbish, old fellow! You're all right, of course—in fact you play your part very nicely! But what would Christmas be without a Tree? See how I shine!! (*The lamps glow.*)

STOCKING (*angrily*)

Sooner a Christmas any time without a Tree than without a Stocking! Why it's the whole joy of Christmas to hang up your stocking, have dreams dancing on your head all night, and dash down in the morning, to pull out—

GIFTS

Gifts!! There you are—it's gifts they're after! What would an empty stocking be? It's Gifts, *Gifts, GIFTS,* that make them happy!

Stocking is about to retort, but Tree pushes him aside.

TREE

There, there—don't quarrel! We all admit that Christmas would be a pretty slow thing without you, Stocking, and that you'd be a pretty disappointing fellow without Gifts. You're both essential to Christmas—

GIFTS AND STOCKING

I guess so!!

STOCKING

Christmas eve and no stocking! Why, it's inconceivable!

GIFTS

Who ever heard of Christmas with no Gifts? Why I enter every lowest hovel, bringing joy wherever I go, and spreading Christmas cheer! I visit the rich man in

his villa, and the convict in his prison, and the soldier in his trench. Everywhere I go, helping, encouraging (*sententiously*) making all men brothers. The whole world becomes one vast fraternity under the charm of the Christmas Gift! Wherever I look in, there you will find Christmas smiling!!

TREE

See how I shine! (*The lamps flash.*) What is a home without me when Christman dawns? Why I am the very centre and symbol of joy!! Round me the family gather, and look at me with smiling eyes! I am the shrine of Christmas. Christmas is Christmas without a single gift, if I stand shining by the hearth!

MONEY

Humph! Where would you all be without me? Whoever heard of anyone's keeping Christmas without Money? I may not make as much show as some of you here, but Money's the biggest thing in life! What's a man without Money? Where can he live? What can he eat? What can he do? I build canals and

palaces, and the great ships that sail on the sea! I wage war, and bring back peace again! I erect hospitals, and bring men healing and comfort. Without me the whole world would fall into chaos, and the race of men would perish. Christman without Money, indeed!

STOCKING

Here comes Plum Pudding! He has attended countless Christmas festivals!

TREE

Yes—but think of his reputation!

STOCKING

I'll admit that he isn't averse to a little liquor and is often in his cups—but he's a man of the world, and has seen life. He ought to know what makes Christmas Christmas. Let's lay the whole matter squarely before him, and abide by his decision.

MONEY

Yes, Plum Pudding knows what's what! I agree.

GIFTS

And I.

TREE

And I.

Enter left Plum Pudding. He is a portly old gentleman, dressed in black velvet, with red stockings, and a red sash.

STOCKING

Good evening, Mr. Pudding! We're having a little discussion here about who's most essential to Christmas. Now I—

TREE

Just tell them, please, what Christmas would be without a tree. See how I shine! (*The lamps glow.*)

PUDDING

Humph!

GIFTS

Mr. Pudding, did you ever hear of Christmas without gifts? (*She takes his arm coquettishly, and smiles up at him.*)

PUDDING (*clearing his throat*)

Well now—

GIFTS

Of course you didn't!

MONEY

Where would they all be, sir, without me?

TREE

Put them all straight now. — See how I shine! (*The lamps glow.*)

STOCKING

Did you ever hear of a child who forgot to hang up his stocking on Christmas eve?

PUDDING

There's a good deal of wisdom in all these claims. Christmas would indeed be a poor thing without Stocking—

TREE

See how I shine! (*The lamps glow.*)

PUDDING

A tree is very important, (*Gifts pulls his arm.*) and no one would be willingly forgotten by Gifts. (*He smiles at her.*) Without Money—

MONEY

Yes, where would they all be without Money, eh?

PUDDING (*sententiously*)

Where indeed?

GIFTS

Well?

STOCKING

Well?

TREE

Well?

MONEY

Well?

PUDDING

Well! What is it that makes Christmas Christmas?

GIFTS

What?

STOCKING

What?

TREE

What?

MONEY

What?

PUDDING

Is it possible you don't know?

All shake their heads.

GIFTS (*smiling at him*)

What do you think?

PUDDING

Think?—I don't think—I know!

GIFTS

Oh!

STOCKING

Oh!

TREE

Oh!

MONEY

Oh!

PUDDING

What is the road to a man's heart? Why his stomach, of course! Do you see? Plum Pudding is what makes Christmas Christmas! Didn't you all refer to me?

Plum Pudding turns and struts off right in a superior manner.

TREE

Always puts himself above everybody else!

GIFTS

Too much *ego*, my dear Tree!

STOCKING

Always over-estimating his own importance.

MONEY

The way to a man's heart is through his —purse! Why I can tell you—

A gay tinkling sound is heard (xylophone) and a lithe, yellow-clad figure enters right. She is dancing and is picking imaginary flowers.

SPIRIT (*singing*)

I am young and take pride
In the flowers in my hair:
My food the wild cherry,
My bed the brown fern!

MONEY

This is no one I know.

GIFTS

Nor I.

SPIRIT

(*still gathering imaginary flowers, and weaving them into wreaths*)

Morning glories, and rue, and hair bells growing with daisies—

MONEY

I don't see anything!

SPIRIT

—all growing under the Christmas star!

GIFTS

She thinks they're there!

MONEY

Perish the thought!

SPIRIT

All sweet flowers for my garland—the rose, the lily, and the stately dahlia.

TREE (*stepping up to her*)

See how I shine! (*The lamps glow.*)

SPIRIT (*drawing back*)

O no, no! You're no child of the wood and meadow! (*singing*)

Though my dress be in tatters,
My footsteps are light.
The stars in the sky
Appear when I sing.

STOCKING (*mockingly*)

She'll be asking us to have a cup of moonlight next!!

MONEY

She's mad.

GIFTS

I'll speak to her. — What's your name?

SPIRIT (*singing*)

I seek with the bee,
Draining sweet from the thorn;
Joy touches my heart
Like the wing of a bird.

GIFTS

Well, where did you come from?

SPIRIT

I can't say the exact place. I have come from the mountains of the Sierra Nevada down through a great sweep of wheat country. So I wandered along the banks of the Ohio, and touched the hills again and passed into the mist, over the waves into the great turmoil of the nations.

MONEY

But where is your home?

SPIRIT

(*singing as she plaits her wreaths*)

When the sun shines out
The spring is my cup;
And I hear from the thrush
That her nestling is flown.

MONEY

You see, she won't tell.

SPIRIT

I pass here and there, lodging in the hearts of men, and I reach down and set my magic on children.

STOCKING

Aren't you cold out in the night with that thin dress?

SPIRIT

The December winds are blowing down from the great icefields in the north, but I am not cold at all, for my heart warms me.

TREE

This is no time to be thinking about yourself! This is Christmas night, don't you know that—the time when there's love and goodwill among men, and every one is giving himself in joy and service for others. — See how I shine! (*The lamps gleam.*)

The Spirit looks about her, bewildered.

MONEY

Everybody is expected to give a little.

SPIRIT

I've flowers.

GIFTS

They're only in your mind.

SPIRIT

And joy and laughter—

MONEY

They don't cost anything. They're just in the hearts of the people. (*holding out his cap to her*) Everybody is expected to give a little!

SPIRIT

That's much too small to contain my gifts!

The Spirit disappears.

GIFTS

Whoever saw the like? Such airs some folks have!

Enter right an old man with his little grandson. They are very poor and wretched. The old man carries on his back a sack which contains all his possessions, and the little boy has a swag on the end of a stick. They come in and rest themselves and their burdens on the bench.

OLD MAN

I'm old—old by a hundred years, and wearied out! Yet it's near midnight,

and we must be getting on to some shelter.

CHILD

How far must we go, grandfather?

OLD MAN

It's always a long way, child, that the poor must travel—a long and weary way!

MONEY (*slinking away*)

They're beggars!

GIFTS (*coming forward*)

It's Christmas eve, my good man, and the hour of midnight is near. I was coming to seek you. I'm Gifts—

OLD MAN (*bitterly*)

Christmas is for the rich—not for us poor folk, driven forth on the road, to celebrate with gifts!

TREE

See how I shine. (*The lamps gleam.*) On Christmas eve even the poor man can bear home a balsam from the hills and

light a taper in its branches to the Blessed Child, to shine into the eyes of his own children!

OLD MAN (*turning away*)

It's a roof tree that I'm lacking this Christmas eve, young man!

STOCKING

But, though the poor man has no home, he has yet a fire where the Christmas stocking may hang!

OLD MAN

Tonight the highway is my hearth, friend!

Enter left the Spirit, and touches the old Man on the sleeve.

SPIRIT

Father, I too have come a long road on Christmas night, and am going a longer still. Shall we not go on together?

OLD MAN

Ah—company on the long dark road! That's something now, my friends!

CHILD

Where did you get those flowers?

GIFTS

Mad!

TREE

Mad!!

MONEY

Mad!!!

OLD MAN

You see, we're very poor, my grandson and I. We're too poor to keep Christmas.

CHILD

I didn't see any flowers, grandfather, as we came along, but now—why they're growing everywhere!

OLD MAN

And what a fine smell they have!

TREE

Can't you see how she's fooling you? Where are her flowers now?

OLD MAN

But can a fine lady like you be seen on the road with poor folks like us?

SPIRIT

Kings came to Him in His manger.

OLD MAN

Then let us be getting along, for the road is dark and difficult.

SPIRIT

The way is bright with moonlight, and the hedges are thick with daisies and hair bells, and the meadows are dotted with buttercups. We shall pass orchards, too, with plums and peaches, and big and little apples, and hanging grapes on a trellis.

OLD MAN (*incredulously*)

This reminds me of the days when I too was young and unwearied!

SPIRIT

And before us faith will run like a wild deer on the mountains. (*singing*)

O rarer than wealth
Are the flowers on my brow!
And fairer than peace
The flame in my heart!

The Old Man and the Child go out left with a confident air, accompanied by the Spirit. As they go they do not heed the others.

GIFTS

She carries a high head, now, and despises us as if she were our betters!

MONEY

There they go, a couple of poor daft shadows begging along the road—a reproach to good people who are enjoying Christmas.

A cloud of incense rises behind the Spirit and the Old Man and Child.

STOCKING

Don't you see a mist rising there?

TREE (*awed*)

And smell a holy fire!

GIFTS

And together they have passed into the mist!

MONEY

But who is she anyway, and what was her business here on Christmas night?

TREE

She's only a poor mad thing with her flowers and her orchards and her moonlight! It's an ill time to be meeting creatures like that—the holy Christmas eve!

GIFTS

The old man's coat was very poor indeed. He needed a new one.

TREE

His hood was all tattered.

STOCKINGS

And his stockings were only rags!

GIFTS

Yet he refused our assistance! That's the way with the poor. They'd rather freeze before our eyes than ease us by taking help!

TREE

He listened to her quick enough!

STOCKING

To empty promises and vain hopes held out, with all her talk about flowers—yes!

TREE

See how I—(*He jumps aside startled, and cries out.*) She has taken away my shine!!!

The others look on in amazement.

GIFTS

A pox on her for taking away the good old ways of celebrating Christmas!

Suddenly the King's Son appears left on the highway. He is dressed in a short purple tunic, and wears a golden circlet on his brow. Money immediately runs forward to salute him.

TREE (*sarcastically*)

Money always follows in the footsteps of the great!

All stand in the way of the King's Son, saluting him. He looks peevish and is evidently annoyed at the interruption.

KING'S SON

What do you want of me?

GIFTS

It was to you, sire, that we were about to proceed. It was to you first of all in the wide realm that we would bring our Christmas greetings.

KING'S SON

And who are you, pray?

GIFTS

I am Christmas Gifts, with my faithful attendant, Money Bag, and we have saved for you the rarest and best—

KING'S SON

But I don't want any more gifts. Already the palace is filled up with them—birthday gifts, christening gifts, Christmas gifts—gifts—gifts—till my eyes are tired of looking!

STOCKING

Sire, you are right. I am the only true symbol of Christmas—I, the Christmas Stocking. You hang me up in the chimney corner, and all night long dreams and fancies dance over your head—

KING'S SON (*irritably*)

I'm much too old for such nonsense! Why I haven't hung up my stocking for—ever so long!

TREE

Sire, I am the Christmas Tree—see how I shine! (*He hesitates to try, but the lights gleam out again.*) I am the shrine of Christmas. On Christmas morning the family gather round me—

KING'S SON

I'm tired of Christmas trees! I have them every year, and they're always the same!—All these things are nothing to me, for in my heart there is great heaviness. What is it that makes Christmas Christmas? I have set out tonight on the great highway of the realm to see whether I shall find Christmas there—I have left my father's house, where I walk between walls of beaten bronze, lighted with silver lamps, and where my father sits on a high throne with a crown on his head and a mastiff at his feet. In the courtyard festive preparations are going forward, and there is a great coming

in of Kings and Princes. But Christmas joy has deserted our palace. I remember the time when my heart was high on Christmas night, but now everything is sodden and dull.

Enter left Spirit, dancing.

SPIRIT (*singing*)

No gem and no gold
Can my spirit oppress;
No mesh and no net
Stay the wing of my flight!

KING'S SON

Who is she? (*He goes toward her.*)

SPIRIT

(*gathering flowers and singing*)

The summer leaves fall
When the harvest is ripe;
The lark song is heard
When the shadows are long.

KING'S SON.

There's a princess in the court who has come up from the south and sits pining for me by the window—but I'll none of

her! And now when I put out my arms to you, you do not come!

SPIRIT

All men have a deep thirst for joy!

KING'S SON

Come to my father's house, and we will dance together in the gardens, you and I playmates—

SPIRIT

O no, no! In palaces there are sad hearts, burdened with the duties of Christmas. I must be happy and free!

KING'S SON

But I will make it different. You may come and go as you will, and you may have a great tall gendarme to keep away anyone who annoys you; and you can console yourself by giving to the poor, who are always near the golden gate—

SPIRIT (*dancing away and singing*)

I pine and I sigh
For no gift and no gold;
The glow in the west
Is treasure to me!

The Spirit disappears.

TREE

It does a heap of good to talk to her! She won't even listen to the King's Son.

Enter left the Old Man and the Boy.

OLD MAN

Alas! Joy caught at my sleeve and disappeared!

KING'S SON

It is the only thing which will not dwell in palaces.

OLD MAN

She was taken away from us as everything else is taken!

TREE (*to the Old Man*)

Because there was nothing there! She and her flowers were an empty show to delude poor daft folks like you.

OLD MAN

With her the way was not dark—while she ran beside us we walked in moonlight. Then she ran ahead. She would wait for us, she said, at the cross roads farther on—and she vanished like a dew! But when

she was gone our sorrow returned and the weariness of the way, and we could not see ahead.

KING'S SON

The poor too!

OLD MAN

She held in her hands joy like a great light. I saw it shining there! And it vanished again!

TREE

My light! She stole it from me for a little while!

GIFTS

What did I tell you—empty promises! And he thought she would wait for his coming at the cross roads!!

TREE

Her blossoms bloomed only a moment, old father, then she deserted you, leaving you on the road alone!

KING'S SON

As she left me, too!

GIFTS

Our promises were more substantial, but you turned from them to her flowers. Did you touch them, then? Did you take them in your hands?

OLD MAN

What I see is mine. She offered fair sights to our eyes, and gentle thoughts to our hearts, such as belong to the poor, and to the children, and to poets. The King and the rich hold their possessions in their hands; but who can play the tyrant with the eye and the thought of a poor man?

KING'S SON

Hark! Again she is filling the air with her sweet sounds!

All stop and listen.

SPIRIT

(*sings in the distance and is not seen*)

My voice meets the voice
Of the forest and cloud;
But the sun never shines
On the gold of the rich.

KING'S SON

It is strange. Her figure is not here, yet the sound comes to us like the film of a dream!

OLD MAN

The form too is here if you see it.

SPIRIT (*still in the distance*)

My life is a joy
That no mystery clouds;
With no pain and no thanks
I give and I get.

KING'S SON

This night my longing has been fulfilled.

OLD MAN

And the poor have been happy.

GIFTS

This is no place for us!!

Gifts, Money, Tree, and Stocking slink away left as the Spirit continues to sing.

SPIRIT (*still in the distance*)

My fancy, my palace—
My joy, my throne—
My dreams are my realm—
And my garlands, my crown!

KING'S SON

Though she speeds over the earth tonight, her spirit has found its resting place.

OLD MAN

For she dwells in our hearts!

The drum beats heavily twelve times.

CURTAIN

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